DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 769 RC 021 919

AUTHOR	Demchak, MaryAnn
TITLE	Facilitating Effective Inclusion through Staff Development.
SPONS AGENCY	Nevada Univ., Reno.
PUB DATE	1999-03-00
NOTE	6p.; In: Rural Special Education for the New Millennium. Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (19th, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 25-27, 1999); see RC 021 888.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College School Cooperation; High Schools; Higher Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; Preservice Teachers; *Program Effectiveness; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Rural Schools; Staff Development; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Nevada

ABSTRACT

A middle school and a high school in rural Nevada participated in a project with the University of Nevada to develop a model for training staff in the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Project participants included all 23 teachers and 3 assistants from both schools, 4 university students in teacher education programs, the district director of special education services and personnel, and a university professor. The university students rotated between two functions: serving as substitute teachers to allow monthly collaborative meetings between the special education and regular education teachers, and participating in the collaborative meetings, thereby gaining educational as well as practical experience. The professor facilitated the collaborative meetings and three inservice training workshops. Questionnaires and interviews indicated that the benefits for regular education teachers included bringing isolated staff closer by sharing common problems and having time to deal with individual students' concerns. Special education teachers felt that regular education teachers gained a greater awareness of special education issues and that the joint problem solving that occurred in collaborative meetings resulted in students being better served. The administrator thought the project provided an easily replicated model. The teachers and administrator both felt the outside influence provided by the professor was advantageous in terms of providing information and assisting with brainstorming. The university students felt that the information provided to them through project participation differed from that obtained in university classes and better prepared them for their future professions. (TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Diane Montgomery

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

MaryAnn Demchak
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
University of Nevada, Reno
Reno, NV 89557

FACILITATING EFFECTIVE INCLUSION THROUGH STAFF DEVELOPMENT

ED 429 769

Inclusion of students with disabilities is increasingly emphasized as a recommended educational practice. As a result, the roles of both special education and general education teachers are changing. Frequently, both general and special educators will indicate that they feel they have not had appropriate training related to effective inclusion. For example, general education teachers are typically not well prepared to make modifications to academic material and special education teachers are infrequently prepared to collaborate with other professionals. The purpose of this presentation is to present a staff development project implemented in a rural school district.

The model implemented was a practical model that is easily replicated in other rural areas near a university or college. This model involved the use of university pre-service students as substitute teachers to allow collaborative meetings to occur between the special education teacher and the general education teachers. Not only did these pre-service students participate in this project as substitutes, they also participated in the collaborative meetings in a staggered fashion. Thus, they received educational as well as practical experiences. (It should be noted that in Nevada to be a substitute teacher one must have 60 university or college credits with 6 of those credits being in education.) Additionally, a university professor was involved in the collaborative meetings as one method of facilitating staff development. In a second method of facilitating staff development, the university professor conducted in-service presentations focused on topics suggested by the staff of the schools.

Project Description

Setting

This project was conducted in a rural high school and middle school in a school district isolated by its location. The schools were reached by one of two narrow, windy mountain roads that are frequently impassable due to winter storms. There were 151 students, grade 9 through 12, in the high school. Of these students, 19 were identified as special education students, with the majority having mild disabilities. Fifteen teachers, two teaching assistants, and one administrator were employed at the high school. Only one of the teachers was a special education teacher; all of the others were general education teachers. The middle school enrolled 143 students, including 16 students identified as special education students. Again, the majority of these students had mild disabilities. Eight teachers, one part-time teaching assistant, and one administrator were employed at the middle school. As was the case at the high school, only one of the teachers was a special education teacher.

University Student Participants

Four university students participated in the project. Two of the students were involved for the entire school year; while the others were each involved for one semester only due to scheduling conflicts. The students, all female, ranged in age from 23 to 41 years (average age of

RC 021919

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

30 years). Three of the students were in the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Two of these students were majoring in elementary and special education (i.e., grades K-12) while the third was in secondary education (with a major in business education and a minor in special education). The fourth student was in Masters degree that was also going to result in a first-time special education license (grades K-12). The only student who had previous experience with secondary-age special education students was the student majoring in secondary education.

Project Funding

The project described in this presentation was made possible through an Outreach Enhancement Grant from the University of Nevada, Reno. This grant program was established in recognition of the University's commitment to the Land Grant ideal which includes using University "ingenuity and expertise to help communities respond to critical needs." The competitive grant process required that
(a) the issue or concern to be addressed must be of significance to the community,
(b) the proposed project must represent new or expanded outreach activities, exemplify a high degree of innovation and show mutual benefits to both the community and the University,
(c) the purpose to be accomplished must be clearly stated,
(d) citizens from the community or their representatives must be involved (e.g., defining issues, planning, or approving the activities, or implementing or evaluating the proposed project),
(e) University students must be involved and play a significant role in the proposed effort,
(f) there must be potential for continued funding to support ongoing activities following conclusion of the specific project, and
(g) the proposed activities should show a high potential for the efficient and effective use of the resources requested.

During the spring prior to project implementation, the project director met with a central office administrator of a rural school district to solicit involvement in the proposed project. This administrator, the director of special education services and the director of personnel, gained the commitment of the schools to be involved. The proposed project was then developed collaboratively with this administrator. The project was funded by the University of Nevada, Reno in the amount of $2,400. These funds were primarily used to reimburse the school district for the costs associated with paying the university students as substitute teachers.

Project Overview

Once a month, the project director, along with three university students, went to either the high school or middle school to observe and meet with pairs of teachers (i.e., a special education teacher and general education teacher) to address concerns. For example, first period was spent observing a specific student as requested by the teachers and second period then involved collaborative problem solving. This pattern was repeated until the end of the school day. Approximately every 8 weeks the school district dismissed their students early so that more formal staff development activities occurred through in-service training. The topics of the training were determined by school district staff as well as from the observations and collaborative problem-solving meetings. Four in-service trainings were scheduled for the school year.

The involvement of the university students allowed the collaborative meetings to occur in that they substituted for the special and general education teachers during the periods in which collaborative meetings occurred. However, in order that the university students benefit educationally, as well as gain the practical experience of substituting, they also had opportunities

to participate in the collaborative meetings. During each visit, the students rotated activities of observing, participating in collaborative meetings, and substituting. For example, during first period Student A observed the secondary student targeted for the collaborative meeting, Student B observed the general education teacher who was to participate in the collaborative meeting, and Student C observed the special education teacher. During second period, Student A participated in the collaborative meeting while Students B and C substituted for the teachers observed during the previous period. The three students rotated through each role in order to experience each role, each visit: observer, collaborator, and teacher.

Project Evaluation

Project outcomes were evaluated in several ways: (a) the high school and middle school teachers completed satisfaction surveys following each in-service presentation, (b) the teachers anonymously completed a brief questionnaire regarding their involvement in the project and the perceived benefits, (c) the two special education teachers, due to their extensive involvement, were interviewed regarding their perceptions, (d) the administrator involved in developing the project was interviewed regarding her perceptions, and (e) the university students were interviewed regarding their involvement upon completion of their participation.

In-service Satisfaction Surveys

Only three of four scheduled in-service workshops occurred; one training was canceled because school was closed early due to snow. Table 1 summarizes the results of the satisfaction surveys for each presentation. The surveys were designed in a Likert-scale format with ratings from 1 to 7, with 1 being poor and 7 being excellent. The directions requested that the number be circled that best described the person's reaction to each item. Additionally, space was provided for written comments.

Table 1
Summary of the Average Ratings for the In-service Satisfaction Surveys

	Workshop #1: Modifications	Workshop #2: Discipline: Legal Requirements	Workshop #3: Classroom / Behavior Management
Organization of workshop	6	6	6
Clarity of workshop objectives	6	6	6
Work of presenter	6	6	6
Ideas and activities of workshop	5	5	5
Scope of workshop	5	6	6
Benefits of attendance	5	5	5
Overall rating	5	6	6

The written comments tended to be positive and commented on organization, openness to questions, clarity, knowledge of the presenter, group discussions, and activities.

Teacher Questionnaire

At the last in-service workshop teachers were given a short, open-ended questionnaire to complete regarding their participation and their perceived benefits of the in-service workshops and collaborative meetings. The perceived benefits of the in-service presentations included reinforcing previous knowledge, interacting with other staff, sharing common problems, and bringing an isolated staff closer via common goals. Some teachers thought that the secondary students indirectly benefited from these presentations in that the teachers were more confident and had reconceptualized methods of interacting with students.

Teachers thought they benefited from the collaborative meetings from the specific problem solving that occurred. The time provided to deal specifically with individual students and unique concerns was viewed as particularly beneficial. The "outside input" was also regarded as advantageous. The secondary students benefited in that the teachers were given suggestions that were implemented and that (in the words of one teacher) "worked well!"

Special Education Teacher and Administrator Interviews

Both special education teachers thought it was advantageous to have the "outside influence" in terms of providing information and assisting with "brainstorming." They both felt that the general education teachers gained a greater awareness of special education issues. The collaborative meetings were viewed as the most beneficial aspect of the project. The joint problem solving was believed to result in students being better served. In the high school, the special education teacher reported that general education teachers came back to ask follow-up questions and seemed to take more responsibility for the special education students. Both special education teachers thought that a greater number of accommodations were implemented in general education classes.

The special education administrator thought the project was especially beneficial because it provided the school district with a model that they could implement following the completion of the University's outreach project. As she stated, "For the cost of two subs per month, I can ensure that the teachers are getting that time together to discuss what issues are facing them in the classroom and how to deal with that." As did the special education teachers, the administrator thought that it was particularly beneficial to have "an outside agency come in" to provide information and to facilitate collaborative meetings. She thought the staff of the district "took it more serious" because the trainer/facilitator was not from the school district. She also reported that general education teachers were paying greater attention to individual student needs and modifying in a more appropriate manner as indicated by teacher discussions she overheard.

University Student Interviews

All of the university students felt the experience was extremely beneficial and better prepared them for their future professions. Two of the students thought that the most beneficial aspect was participating in the collaborative meetings while the other two thought the observations were most beneficial. All of the students thought the in-service workshops were informative and provided them with different information than they had obtained to date in their teacher preparation classes at the university. They all found the collaborative meetings to be

advantageous due to the group brainstorming that occurred. Unfortunately, they were disappointed in their perceived lack of follow-through with many of the suggestions. Although all of the students were nervous prior to the start of their participation, they all became more confident as the project progressed.

Conclusion

From the questionnaires and interviews completed as part of the evaluation of this outreach project it appears that the project was successful in achieving its goals. Not only did the school district teachers enhance their knowledge and skills, but the university students broadened their experiences and knowledge. The success of this project might be attributed to the school-wide nature of the project (all teachers and teaching assistants were involved) as well as to the fact that the project was extended throughout the entire school year. The on-going nature of the project allowed teachers to try out various recommendations and to get feedback. The fact that the project also had a direct relationship to the teachers' day-to-day activities (i.e., they selected the students to focus on in the collaborative meetings) may have contributed to the perceived successfulness. Additionally, the topics of the in-service workshops were determined by school district personnel. This type of involvement in planning and implementing staff development is critical to its efficacy.

In addition to benefiting the personnel of the high school and middle school, pre-service university students also benefited. These students felt they received practical experiences that would go a long way in benefiting them in their future university internships and as well as in their professional careers.

This project was a relatively low-cost means of providing training to current teachers and future teachers with indirect benefit to public school students.